

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-01

INR-10 NSAE-00 ICA-20 TRSE-00 XMB-04 OPIC-06

SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 NSC-05 SS-15 STR-07

CEA-01 PA-02 /105 W

-----037681 020002Z /13

R 011454Z JUN 78

FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4377

DEPTAGRIC WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

UNCLAS LENINGRAD 01624

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EPAP, ECON, UR

SUBJECT: DRY WEATHER THREATENS LENINGRAD OBLAST AGRICULTURE

1. LATEST AGRICULTURAL FIGURES AS OF MAY 29, PUBLISHED BY LENINGRAD CITY AND OBLAST STATISTICAL DIVISION, REVEALED THAT FORTNIGHT DELAY IN PLANTING DUE TO LATE WINTER HAS BEEN OVERCOME IN MANY AREAS, BUT VEGETABLE PLANTING IS IN DIFFICULTY AND ALL CROPS ARE THREATENED BY AN UNSEASONABLE DROUGHT.

2. 140 THOUSAND HECTARES HAVE BEEN PLANTED, OR 89 PERCENT OF PLANNING GOAL, WHICH IS 7 PERCENT MORE THAN AT THIS SAME TIME LAST YEAR. BUT STATISTICAL REPORT CARRIED BY LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA (MAY 31) DESCRIBED AS "ALARMING" THE FACT THAT PLANTING OF VEGETABLES IS 5 PERCENT BEHIND LAST YEAR, WITH TWO OF THE ELEVEN RAIONS SHOWING FIGURES FOR VEGETABLE PLANTING (OUT OF 17 TOTAL) HAVING FULFILLED LESS THAN 40 PERCENT OF PLAN. BY CONTRAST, ALMOST ALL RAIONS HAVE FULFILLED THEIR POTATO PLANTING QUOTAS. PLANTING OF ROOTCROPS IS QUITE UNEVEN WITH ONE RAION HAVING FULFILLED ONLY 11 PERCENT OF PLAN, 5 HAVING FULFILLED THEIR QUOTA, AND THE UNCLASSIFIED

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BALANCE BEING IN 40 TO 80 PERCENT RANGE.

3. STATISTICAL REPORT SOUNDED WHAT HAS BECOME REFRAIN OF CONCERN IN LOCAL PRESS OVER THE PROLONGED DRY SPELL BY COMMENTING THAT "WEATHER URGENTLY REQUIRES THAT WORK BE HASTENED TO FULFILL THE TASKS OF MAINTAINING MOISTURE IN THE SOIL, IRRIGATING THE PLANTINGS AND FIGHTING WEEDS."

LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA ON MAY 21 CARRIED A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE SUMMARIZING RECENT MEETING OF OBLAST "STAFF FOR SOIL IRRIGATION." ARTICLE BEGAN BY NOTING THAT SOIL HAD DRIED OUT SO MUCH IN PLACES THAT IT HAD HELD BACK PLANTING OF CABBAGES, THAT PERENNIAL GRASSES WERE STUNTED AND MULTI-YEAR PASTURAGE NEEDED IRRIGATION. IT WAS DECIDED AT THIS OBLAST MEETING TO INCREASE IRRIGATION TO 3,000 HECTARES, OR TEN TIMES THE ANNUAL NORM, AND FARMS AND IRRIGATION ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE OBLAST WERE SHARPLY ATTACKED FOR BEING CAUGHT UNPREPARED AND NOT REACTING WITH SUFFICIENT VIGOR.

4. MAY 31 LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA HIGHLIGHTED THE PROBLEM BY CARRYING SPECIAL BULLETIN FROM OBLAST "SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR FIGHTING FOREST FIRES." IT STATED THAT, BECAUSE OF "EXTENDED DRY WEATHER AND CARELESS ATTITUDE OF CITIZENS TOWARD FIRE," THERE HAD BEEN FIRES IN WOODS, PEAT QUARRIES AND AGRICULTURAL LAND. ACCORDINGLY, FROM JUNE 2 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, IT IS FORBIDDEN TO VISIT WOODS OF KARELIA ISMTHUS NORTH OF VUOKS RIVER, OR RIVERS AND LAKES IN PEAT WORKING AREAS, OR TO LIGHT BONFIRES, TO SMOKE OR WORK WITH OPEN FIRE IN LENINGRAD OBLAST OR RECREATIONAL ZONES OF THE CITY.

5. COMMENT: LENINGRAD NON-BLACK SOIL AGRICULTURE IS RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT IN THE NATIONAL BALANCE (EVEN UNCLASSIFIED

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THOUGH A RECENT LOCAL BOOSTER ARTICLE CLAIMED THAT REGION COULD PRODUCE ENOUGH RYE TO SATISFY ALL USSR NEEDS FOR BLACK BREAD, CURRENTLY IN UNEVEN SUPPLY). BUT GIVEN LENINGRAD'S IMPORTANCE AS AN INDUSTRIAL AND TOURIST CENTER, UNUSUAL SHORTAGES IN THIS AREA WILL REQUIRE INCREASED DRAW-DOWNS FROM OTHER PARTS OF USSR. SOVIET AUTHORITIES HAVE CAUSE, THEREFORE, TO BE CONCERNED BY CURRENT DROUGHT. BUCHANAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGRICULTURE, METEOROLOGY, DROUGHTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LENING01624
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780230-0289
Format: TEL
From: LENINGRAD
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197806108/aaaadora.tel
Line Count: 102
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f79bc97d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2163525
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DRY WEATHER THREATENS LENINGRAD OBLAST AGRICULTURE
TAGS: EPAP, ECON, UR
To: STATE AGR
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f79bc97d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014